

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 159539

LIMDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT BANGKOK 11788 SENT ACTION SECSTATE
VIENTIANE PHNOM PENH SAIGON JUL 20TH.

QUOTE:

S E C R E T BANGKOK 11788

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, TH, LA

SUBJECT: RELATIONSHIP OF NVN FORCES IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS AND
U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND

REF: A. STATE 155362

B. BANGKOK 11396

C. STATE 136601

D. BANGKOK 5133

E. BANGKOK 3914

F. BANGKOK 2784

G. BANGKOK 9673

H. BANGKOK 2457

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I. BANGKOK 9056

J. BANGKOK 11665

1. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN OR OTHER THAI GOVERNMENT LEADERS INTEND TO HAVE THE FUTURE DISPOSITION OF U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND DEPENDENT SOLELY ON SPECIFIC NORTH VIETNAMESE ACTIONS IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA. OVER THE PAST YEAR THERE HAS BEEN A VIRTUAL FLOOD OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS WELL AS PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS ON THE BASIC JUSTIFICATIONS FOR U.S. FORCES IN THAILAND. OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUEES AND INSTRUCTIONS HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT U.S. FORCE LEVELS AND WITHDRAWAL RATES WILL BE KEYED TO THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA OR SOUTHEAST ASIA AS A WHOLE (REFS C AND D). FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN AND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI HAVE TOLD THE THAI PRESS CORPS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES WILL BE CARRIED OUT GRADUALLY DEPENDING ON THE GENERAL SITUATION IN INDOCHINA (REFS E, F AND G). THEY HAVE REJECTED AT EVERY TURN THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY UNILATERAL U.S. WITHDRAWAL, AT TIMES APPEARING TO LINK THIS SPECIFICALLY TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF NVN FORCES FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA (REFS H AND I). IN THIS REGARD, CHATCHAI TOLD THE "NEW YORK TIMES" THAT HIS RESPONSE TO THE NVN DEMAND THAT U.S. FORCES BE REMOVED FROM THAILAND WAS TO SAY: "ALL RIGHT, LET'S DO THE SAME THING. YOU WITHDRAW YOUR TROOPS FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA AND WE WILL ASK THE AMERICANS TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM THAILAND," (REF I).

2. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, CONCLUDE THAT ANY PARTICULAR STATEMENT ON AN ISOLATED OCCASION REPRESENTS THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE THAI POSITION ON THE BASIC CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND. THE THAI DO INTEND TO DETERMINE THEMSELVES WHEN OR IF THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE SHOULD END. THEY HAVE EMPHASIZED THIS RIGHT REPEATEDLY, AND HAVE QUOTED CHATCHAI'S REPORT OF HEARING FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER IN OCTOBER 1973 THAT THE UNITED STATES RECOGNIZES THAT IT IS UP TO THAILAND TO DECIDE WHETHER AMERICAN FORCES SHOULD REMAIN OR BE WITHDRAWN: "WHATEVER YOU WANT, WE ARE WILLING TO DO." (REFS G, H AND I) ARTICULATE AND INFLUENTIAL THAI WILL HOLD THEIR LEADERS AND US TO ACCOUNT ON THIS POINT AND IT WOULD BE FOLLY FOR US TO BELIEVE OR ACT OTHERWISE.

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3. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE AS THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT THEMSELVES AND IT IS APPROPRIATE, TO SEEK GREATER CLARIFICATION AND DELINEATION OF THE EXTERNAL CONDITIONS THE THAI FEEL MUST EXIST BEFORE THEY WILL ASK US TO WITHDRAW ALL OUR FORCES. EVEN AMBASSADOR ANAN, WHO HAS NOT BEEN HELPFUL ON OTHER MATTERS DURING HIS RECENT CONSULTATIONS IN BANGKOK, FIELDDED THIS QUESTION RELATIVELY SKILLFULLY IN HIS RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE (REF J).

4. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: THE INDO-CHINA-WIDE RATIONALE FOR THE RETENTION OF AMERICAN FORCES IN THAILAND HAS BEEN DISCUSSED BY ME REPEATEDLY AND AT LENGTH WITH TOP LEADERS OF THE RTG, INCLUDING THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND HIS DEPUTY. THEIR EXCELLENT UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF OUR POSITION HAS BEEN WELL DOCUMENTED IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE EMBASSY CABLES REFERRED TO ABOVE. THEY ARE QUITE CLEARLY WORRIED ABOUT POTENTIAL PATHET LAO ASCENDANCY IN LAOS AND THE THREAT POSED BY NVA CONTROL OF APPROXIMATELY MILES OF THE LAOTIAN SIDE OF THE MEKONG-THAI-LAOTIAN BORDER. IN THIS CONTEXT I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THEIR RAISING WITH ME THEIR INTEREST IN GETTING THE NVA OUT OF LAOS TO REMIND THEM THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR WITHDRAWAL OF THESE FORCES NOW RESTS WITH HANOI. I REGRET IF MY REPORTING OF THIS BRIEF CONVERSATION AND CHARUNPHAN'S AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE TO TAKE AN INITIATIVE IN GENERATING PRESSURE FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF NVA FORCES FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA CAUSED DISTRESS AMONG WASHINGTON READERS OF REF B. I WISH TO ASSURE ADDRESSEES THAT THERE IS NO CONFUSION IN MY MIND REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO RETENTION OF U.S. AIR POWER IN THAILAND. I CONSIDER IT ESSENTIAL HOWEVER, TO TAKE FULL TACTICAL ADVANTAGE OF OPENINGS PROVIDED IN THE COURSE OF OFFICIAL CONTACTS, AND IN THIS CASE I PROVIDED PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKING FOR OUR THAI FRIENDS ON MATTERS THAT THREATEN THEM MOST DIRECTLY SO AS TO ENHCNCE THEIR SUPPORT FOR OUR MILITARY PRESENCE HERE WHICH UNDERGIRDS OUR POLICY OBJECTIVES FOR ALL OF INDO-CHINA. KINTNER UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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